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Carnahan Watched Speech At Home of South St. Louis Family Who Wrote Letter Encouraging Him to Continue Fighting for Struggling Families

(ST. LOUIS) - Congressman Russ Carnahan (MO-03) released the following statement after President Obama's first State of the Union address:

"Tonight's speech was a reminder that it's time for to set aside partisan differences and focus on working together to restore the American Dream for middle class families.

"We're coming out of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. There are strong signs of improvement, but we cannot rest until people are back to work. That means we must be strategic in the investments we make. We have to make some tough decisions and focus our efforts on areas that are proven job creators in the short and the long term.

"Families are still struggling. Tonight, I watched the President's speech with one of these families. MaryJo and Tim Clark want what we all want. They want to build a better life for their kids, have decent health care they can rely on, spend their retirement financially secure. They've played by the rules, paid their bills, tried to put away some money for retirement. But like so many others, the Clarks have struggled in recent months. Tim and their daughter are out of work; other family members have found it hard to find affordable health insurance.

"But MaryJo and Tim also possess the kind of indomitable spirit that has made this country great. The American people are defined by our determination, our aspiration to achieve greatness, and our refusal to give up hope, even in the face of tough times.

"People are sick of the partisan bickering in Washington. The problems they are dealing with are far too serious, and they want solutions. It's time to push through the politics of obstructionism in order to do what is right for MaryJo and Tim, and millions of families just like them."

Congressman Carnahan watched the President's speech at the home of MaryJo Clark, an area high school art teacher. Earlier this week, MaryJo wrote a letter - the first she had ever written to a public official -- urging Carnahan to keep fighting for families struggling to find employment, keep up with health care bills and plan for a secure retirement.

MaryJo's letter to Congressman Carnahan follows:

Although I have never before contacted one of my elected officials, I feel that, current conditions being what they are, I wanted to make my voice heard. I'm a middle-aged, middle class woman who, like so many others, has been affected by the current economic situation. One of the issues that I would like to address is health care reform. The media keeps stating that it's a dead issue, that the recent Massachusetts senate election was a national election (it was not) that seems to mandate the public's desire to have the issue put to rest. I wholly disagree. This country desperately needs healthcare reform. Are there problems with current Senate and House bills being proposed? I'm sure that there are. Do the Republicans have better ideas? I'm sure that some do, but I'm not aware of any.

If nothing else is addressed, there are some conditions about our current system of health care that must change. Insurance companies should not be allowed to refuse coverage due to a pre-existing condition. If my niece, who has diabetes, ever loses her insurance, it may be impossible for her to get coverage. Having insurance provided through one's employer is an antiquated idea. Continually rising healthcare costs are placing financial burdens on many small and large businesses. People who lose their jobs also lose their insurance. And if one doesn't have a job, one can't afford to buy personal insurance. It's a real Catch-22 and it's exactly what has happened to my daughter, who has now become one of those millions of people who is currently uninsured. Be it a public option, a co-op, or some other arrangement, everyone should be able to have some type of affordable basic health insurance.

I keep hearing that 'jobs' is the issue of greatest concern to the population and I do agree that it is a critical. My husband, my daughter, my brother-in-law, my cousin, and my niece's husband have all been out of work for many months. So yes, getting people back to work is a very real concern for me. That being said, I don't think we can fully address the jobs and employment issue, without also taking into consideration the issue of healthcare. Let's face it, as things currently stand, employment and healthcare go hand-in-hand.

I've tried to do my best to be a good citizen. I vote in most elections; I pay my taxes; I've even served on juries. I've tried to be financially responsible. I work for a living; I save some money; I contribute to my retirement plan; I've paid for my house; I don't have credit card debt. Yet, despite doing the things I should be doing, I, and my family, have fallen victim to the irresponsible practices of some of our largest financial institutions. Additionally, my daughter and millions of others just like her, have fallen victim to the unnecessary flaws of our current health care system.

In your capacity as a legislator you have the responsibility and obligation to affect changes that can help to put this country back on the right track. I ask that you not forget those of us that you've been elected to serve. These issues may not be real to you, but for far too many of us, they are a harsh reality.

Sincerely,

MaryJo Clark
St. Louis, MO

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